

Cross-Cultural Leadership and Employee Performance in Multinational Organization: Strategies, Competencies, and Implications

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Abstract: In today's increasing globalised business world, adapting to a diverse cultural context of staff is essential for effective leadership, and improved productivity. The purpose of this research is to identify the relationship between effective global leadership, multi-cultural team management and employee performance. The study adopts qualitative research method, and convenient sampling, with the use of structured questionnaire and data collected from experienced cross-cultural leaders and culturally diverse staff of multinational firms. It analyses cultural dimension frameworks, cross-cultural leadership styles and skills, and practical strategies that leaders of multinational firms could adopt in ensuring a motivated, valued and satisfied multicultural staff. The result is revealed a positive relationship between effective cross-cultural leadership and employee performance. The study recommends improved communication, cultural training, inclusive leadership, servant leadership and transformational leadership as good drives for the success of multinational firms. Further, the study highlights digital literacy, emotional intelligence, multilingualism as key competencies for effective global leadership.

Keywords: (digital-first) multinational firms, multinational teams, employee satisfaction, Cross-cultural leadership, cultural intelligence, multinational performance, employee performance, cultural intelligence,

The Increasing globalized business landscape has necessitated the formation of teams that transcend borders and cultures in Business organizations. This on one hand offer benefits to organizations including increasing sales and innovation from the diverse minds it employs, and on the other, pose challenging effects especially in managing diverse teams of staff and management.

According to Adler and Gundersen (2008), "Cross-cultural management explains the behaviour of people in organizations around the world and shows people how to work in organizations with employees and client populations from many different cultures." Thus, Cross cultural management analyses how people from different cultural backgrounds worldwide react to issues, situations and decisions within the organisation, and how management of the multinationals guide and leverage on these diverse attitudes towards reaching organisational goals. That is, the subject encompasses the capability to manage, appreciate and understand individuals and teams from culturally diverse backgrounds, while leveraging on their diverse capabilities for an enhanced organisational outcome across several cultural landscape (Rockstuhl, et al., 2011). This also includes adeptness in adaptative leadership, effective communication, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and coordination within the team (As'ad, et al., 2024; Ang, et al., 2007; Rockstuhl, et al., 2011).

Cultural Intelligence, for instance, requires leaders to adjust to the values and norms of the culture of the society in which they find themselves (without compromising the core mission and vision of their organisations) (Nosratabadi, et al., 2020). In compliment, Emotional intelligence (E.I) projects leaders in organizations where technical skills are, for instance, not a real priority. It is that skill to know and manage our emotions and that of others in different cultural contexts (Goleman, 2016). E.I influences how leaders manage relations, interpreting attitudes and reflecting on experiences (Watkins, et al., 2017).

Background

Cross-cultural leadership and global teams' management have recently received much attention in academia and in corporate settings. This is due to the effects of globalization on organisational structure and the evidences of a positive relationship between effective leadership across cultures and productivity within global organisations.

Globalization has affected the structure of contemporary businesses across the globe, causing businesses today to rely on teams in different geographically disperse regions and countries of the world to accomplish their goals and missions (Hadi, 2023). As companies expand beyond domestic borders, it becomes economically prudent to invest in the human resources within the locality of the subsidiary, thus, in whole, creating a team of

experts from different regions and cultures whose diverse perspective and culture breeds innovation and productivity if well managed (Stahl, et al., 2009).

In as much as these multinational teams produce huge advantages to companies including their synergistic ability in problem-solving, improved innovation capacity, and a wider and better understanding of their market; multinational teams pose a higher challenge to leaders who need to manage the global team's different cultural values, norms, decision making barriers, perspectives and communication barriers (As'ad, et al., 2024). The cross-cultural leader needs to be able to understand the impact of the diverse cultural backgrounds and values of their team on the team's dynamics, and how their individual behaviours are poised to improving employee satisfaction, foster team co-operation, and productivity (Haroon, et al., 2019). A better understanding of the team's conflicting cultures and the ability to adapt leadership strategies to fit his diverse team's nature and organisational goals are effective traits of effective leadership in cross-cultural and transnational teams. Unfortunately, many of such leaders are overwhelmed by the increasing rate at which the impact of culture in global expansion is affecting their businesses' performance and growth (Tung, 2016).

Problem statement

Even as a number of firms and organisations expand into international markets, many leaders continue to struggle to effectively navigate teams with different cultural backgrounds towards the common goal of their multinational companies (Hadi, 2023). They are either less prepared to meet the challenges multicultural teams come with (House, et al., 2004), or struggle to manage the cultural clashes that often erupts from globalisation to affect the global team's satisfaction, cohesion and productivity. (House, et al., 2004). Managers who try to apply traditional leadership styles in different cultural contexts have not succeeded (House, et al., 2004). They needed more training and research to know in which culture contexts they need to apply which leadership style, theory or practice (Northouse, 2025).

Participative leadership, for instance, in which team members are actively consulted or involved in decision making, could thrive in individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 2001) but this same leadership style may be sabotaged in Russia, China and other hierarchical or collectivist cultures (Lewis 2018; House, et al., 2004). There is thus, the need to clarify the cross-cultural leadership theories, and in which cultural settings they are best suited.

In addition, fuelled by the 2019/20 pandemic's requirements of working from home, cross-cultural communication and collaboration complexities have surged recently with the rise in the number of employees who wish to work remotely within the past decade (Caligiuri, et al., 2022). This has paved way for the recruiting team members across the globe. This adds to the need for clarity and guidance in the application of applicable leadership approaches in the management of teams in virtual and multicultural work environments.

Also, the fight for talents on the global scale requires management skill to manage because inability to manage this could negatively impact the performance, satisfaction, motivation, staff turnover, the reputation of the organisation... (Tung, 2016) .

Having guided leaders on the application of leadership theories across cultures, there also arise the need to link these theories that impact the cross-culture's team satisfaction and performance. Thus, the need to clarify systems that measures the impact of cross-cultural leaders. This would resolve Matveev and Nelson (2004)'s observation on organisations not linking their trainings and workshops on diversity and cultural awareness to performance outcomes or leadership practices.

Even though, contemporary studies highlight the likely benefits and inherent challenges of the various dimensions of cross-cultural management such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner seven dimensions of culture, there has been no agreement on which framework practices is best for managing cross-cultural teams. Other studies limit their scope to specific cultures or industries, thus limiting the applicability of their findings to the areas they scoped in their research. There is the need for research that looks at different perspectives to develop strategies that could be applied universally.

Objectives

This study aims at exploring and analysing the role of cross-cultural leadership in managing multinational teams effectively and efficiently, focusing on contemporary strategies that improves employee satisfaction and performance. The main aim is to bridge the gap between theories in managing cross-cultural teams and practice by providing pragmatic approaches for global leaders.

The key objectives of this study are below:

1. To explore the main challenges that leaders face in managing cross-cultural teams and multinational firms.

This encompasses an examination of Hofstede's and Trompenaars's dimension and other models that influence communication, motivation, and expectations within cross cultural teams.

2. To evaluate effective leadership strategies and competencies in managing cross-cultural (and virtual) teams.

This includes evaluating leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, servant and inclusive leadership styles; leadership competencies like emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and other relevant competencies.

3. To analyse the impact of global leaders on employee motivation, satisfaction and performance.
This objective is to establish the link between culturally intelligent leaders and improved team outcome. This draws on theories in organisational behaviour and empirical studies.
4. To recommend a framework of best practices that seeks to improve cross-cultural team's satisfaction, cohesion, employee engagement, and performance
This aims at offering a pragmatic, adaptable set of guidelines that is applicable across diverse cultural contexts.

Research Questions

1. How do cross-cultural leaders manage challenges that managing multinational firms pose to them?
2. How do leadership strategies apply in managing multicultural teams?
3. How does the cultural competence of multinational leaders impact the global team's performance?
4. What framework defines the acceptable leadership practices across diverse cultures, and how does it apply in navigating the global teams' satisfaction, cohesion, motivation and productivity.

The chapters below discuss related theories and frameworks (In the Literature reviews I and II); The Methodology chapter discusses the sampling size, methods and analysis methods and the practicality of the research; The Findings / Analysis / Discussion chapter discusses the data collected while the conclusion session gives a conclusion of the key findings of the study.

I. Literature Review

Understanding cultural differences in this globalised contemporary business environment has become critical. Adler and Gundersen (2008) identified that this understanding informs and guides leadership decisions on the impact of diverse cultures on business practices, patterns of effective communication across cultures, effective leadership styles, and their overall impact on organisational performance. This requires continuously seeking to improve one's understanding in their culture, and how others perceive the former's culture, a desire to learn about other cultures, and building an adaptive mindset to accommodate the culturally diverse experiences (Earley and Ang, 2003). A careful application of this improves employee satisfaction and consequently, organisational performance.

This review analyses cross-cultural leadership, cross-cultural management theories, cultural intelligence (CQ), from foundational framework to contemporary approaches, their application to multinational teams and how they impact organisations' outcome.

Core perspectives and evolution of leadership theories

Leadership is the ability to influence subordinates towards set goals. According to Yukl (2013) research on leadership emerged from trait-based views/approaches, to behavioural approaches, to contingency, to contemporary theories including relational/transformational approaches to cross-cultural / Cultural intelligence models.

Trait-based leadership approach

Proponents of the Trait-based approaches revealed that some individuals are born leaders ('born, not made') exhibiting unique skills and attitudes including intelligence, determination, charisma and confidence (Stogdill, 1948). This approach however failed to consider context factors, follower dynamics and predictive power (Zaccaro, 2007; Yukl, 2013).

Behavioural leadership approach

In contrast, the behavioural approach emphasizes 'what leaders do' instead of 'who leaders are' as a better way to identify leaders. This approach anchors on studies by the Ohio state and Michigan studies in the 1950's which highlighted relational orientation and task orientation (Northouse, 2025). The behavioural

approach countered the trait theories, noting that leadership behaviours could be developed and learnt by every willing individual through organisational training and development exercises.

Contingency leadership approach / theories

In the contingency and situational approach, the effectiveness of leaders is dependent on the context or situation or circumstance that the leader found themselves in. This leadership approach thrived on a balance in leadership style, consideration to the needs of followers, and the situational context of the leaders (Yukl, 2013). Some proponents of this theory included House's Path-Goal Theory (1971), and Blanchard's Situational Leadership theory (1969). The contingency theory gained prominence in the late 60's and early 70's until researchers like Northouse (2018) revealed that the approach did not offer enough empirical support, and also made complex social dynamics look very simplistic.

Transformational leadership approach

Transformation leadership, introduced in the 90's, anchors on the leader's charisma or inspiration and their intellectual capabilities (Bass, 1990). The leader's ability to set shared goals (often above the followers' personal goals), and inspire and develop diverse followers to reach same is a measure of their effectiveness. Leaders are passionate and committed to the goal as well. Even though this approach has received sustained empirical support due to its dynamic, relational approach to leadership, and follower motivation strategies (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013), if misapplied could lead to an unquestioned obedience to all orders of the leader, impeding creativity and autonomy of the followers (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2013).

Cross-cultural leadership approach

Assisted by advancement in today's technology, Cross-cultural leadership and cultural intelligence dominate leadership approaches and research. This is basically due the impact of globalisation, the culturally diverse work environment, and employee increasing preference for working remotely, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Ang and Van Dyne 2015). This approach highlights the need for integrating multiple perspective, observing, learning and understanding the cultural variances of other cultures, and adapting to relevant ideas and values that impacts performance. Rockstuhl et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis supports this approach, revealing how outcome could be predicted by the cultural intelligence of leaders. However, Osland (2013) identified that being culturally sensitive and adapting to the different cultural values could only be the initial stage of global leadership. Leaders need to prioritise a universal mindset, systems thinking and taking responsibility of ethical blunders they cause.

Leadership has transformed over the years, yet there has not been a universal approach that could apply to all environments or followers in the continuously dynamic organisational environment. The effective leader in contemporary firms lead with empathy, flexibility, inclusivity, awareness and readiness to learn continuously, even as they adjust to technological tools that are dominating the global business environment today.

Theories and strategies in multinational team management

The need for interdependence on economies in this globalised business environment has also increased collaborations among teams from diverse political and cultural backgrounds towards achieving shared objectives. Reaching these objectives in a culturally diverse environment requires effective management and leadership that leverages on the cultural differences to maximize opportunities therein. If well managed, a culturally diverse team can enhance innovation, sales and decision making; the reverse could conversely lead to process losses (Stahl et al., 2009).

- Management frameworks in cross-cultural teams

Cross-cultural theories serve as foundational theories for multinational team management. Among the theories for analysing and understanding the behaviour and values of diverse teams are the Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven-dimension model (1997) which expands on Hofstede's dimensions, and the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004).

- Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

Hofstede's dimension reveals some basic cultural issues that multinational firms and cross-cultural organisations need to adjust to in order to thrive in the globalized work environment. According to Hofstede (2001), the Individualism-collective dimension describes the degree to which people depend or feel independent in a larger team. Power Distance is how the minority of the team anticipate and accepts the unequal distribution of power of people in authority. Masculinity dimension describes the degrees at which coercion is accepted socially; the affirmative is a masculine society; feminism is characterised by emotionally closer teams.

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which society embrace uncertainty and ambiguity. The Long-term orientation discusses the extent to which the team embraces the past / tradition, or the modern or change and prepares for the unforeseen future. Indulgence dimension views the degree to which people perceive freedom and how positive they see perceive. (Minkov, 2011) in his study reduced the cultural dimension into two factors, synchronising difference cultural models and predicting key environmental indicators. McSweeney (2002) however objects to Hofstede's dimension positing that the dimensions overly rely on limited and outdated data. He adds that the dimension simplifies actual issues of cultural diversity/issues in teams.

Even though Hofstede's dimensions serve as a reference for many analysis and theories in cross cultural management, users may need to consider the uniqueness of their team and their cultural variables.

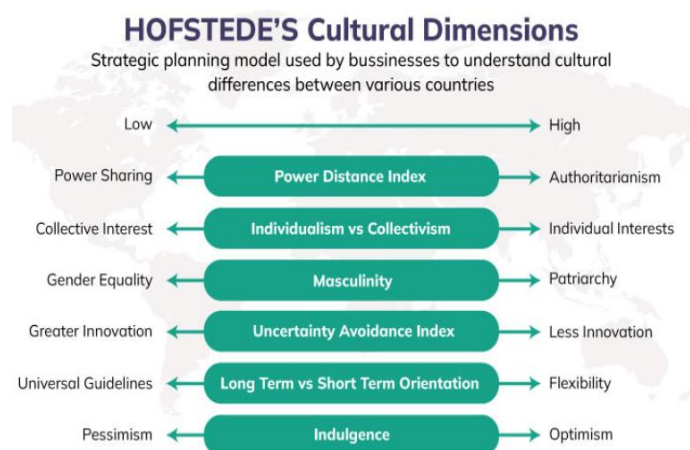


Figure 1: Hofstede's dimension

Source: Adapted from Hofstede (2001); designed by (Miller, 2022)

Hofstede's dimension, though noted for its comparatively simplistic application, and consulted as foundational theory in cross-cultural and multinational team management as compared to GLOBE study, it is outdated and its scales may not be reliable in the contemporary cross cultural environment (Gerlach and Eriksson, 2021). It is also noted to have relied on data collected from only IBM company. Hofstede's dimensions are effective in cross-cultural leadership today if it is blended with other recent theories and applicable technology

- Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven-dimension

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven-dimension model (1997) has also been one of the predominantly used dimensions for analysing multinational / cross cultural teams. This dimension is an extension of Hofstede's dimensions, citing Hofstede's Individualism-particularism theory. The seven dimensions are Universalism vs. Particularism describes the extent to which a culture upholds rules (fairness, equality for all) or relationships. Individualism vs communitarianism emphasizes either citizen prioritises teamwork or going solo. The Neutral vs. Emotional dimension describes the extent to which individual in a cultural setting control their emotions. Specific vs. Diffuse dimension describes how participants drew the balance between work-life. Achievement vs. Ascription emphasizes the extent to which people valued achievement or legacies. The Timing Orientation describes how people value time, and proposes nature in which projects are to be completed – sequential or in groups. The Internal or external control dimension emphasizes the perception of individual's ability to control their environment.

Comparatively, Trompenaars dimensions are noted for its dynamic and problem-solving capability over Hofstede's which have been criticised for its static and deterministic viewpoint (McSweeney, 2002). Compared with the GLOBE study, Trompenaars dimension does not provide the in-depth empirical validation like the GLOBE study does (House et al., 2004), however, it is noted for balancing and integrating conflicting values.

The GLOBE study

The GLOBE study has been described as the 'Manhattan project of study of leadership' due to its comprehensive research into the relationship between culture and leadership behaviour in several diverse societies, organisations and cultures worldwide (House et al., 2004). The study reveals that the leader's effectiveness is dependent on the norms and values of the cultural and organisational settings in which they find themselves and the people they lead (Javidan et al., 2006).

Power Distance	The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.
Humane Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.
Collectivism I (Institutional)	The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.
Collectivism II (In-Group)	The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.
Assertiveness	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others.
Gender Egalitarianism	The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.
Future Orientation	The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.
Performance Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and

Figure 2: The GLOBE study cultural dimensions

Source: Adapted from House et al. (2004)

The study compares cultural practices and values to the different leadership style used in diverse cultures (Chhokar, Brodbeck, and House, 2007). It reveals how leadership is perceived by other cultures, and thus, how leaders could leverage on this knowledge to align their leadership styles accordingly. The study also describes nine dimensions that differentiated societies and cultures from another. The GLOBE also describes desirable features of leaders and expectations of what an effective leader should be. The study describes six behaviours of leaders (leadership styles): Humane oriented, Participative, Team oriented, Charismatic / value based, Autonomous, Self-protective, Charismatic, and Self-protective (House et al., 2004). These behaviours and dimensions have however been criticised as being based on subscales that do not depict distinct behaviours, but overlap. They are not well differentiated (Brewer and Venaik, 2014). It has also been criticised for its complexity, in spite of its wide scope into cultural contingencies (Yukl, 2013).

The Wheel diagram in figure 3 classifies countries into groups (clusters) based on the clusters' common leadership expectations, cultural practices and cultural values they share. The cluster also assist leaders to understand the tendency of a group of countries, and to align his strategies according for favourable outcome. For instance, the study revealed that countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa (the Black group) are predominantly empathic, altruistic, fair, and caring towards other team members, as such leaders could be effective in such cultures if they incorporate these attributes in their leadership and management of the multinational team. The leader does not have to study the various countries' cultural tendencies individually.

Figure 4 - Cultural clusters classified on cultural dimensions, adapted from the globe study categorises the various clusters under the nine cultural dimensions. Countries in the Eastern Europe (Russia, Greece, Poland) in the 'Assertive Orientation and the High score cluster' vertex score higher in their level of Assertiveness. They are more confrontational and aggressive (assertive) than those in the Nordic Europe (Sweden, Denmark and Finland) who are in the Low-score cluster vertex

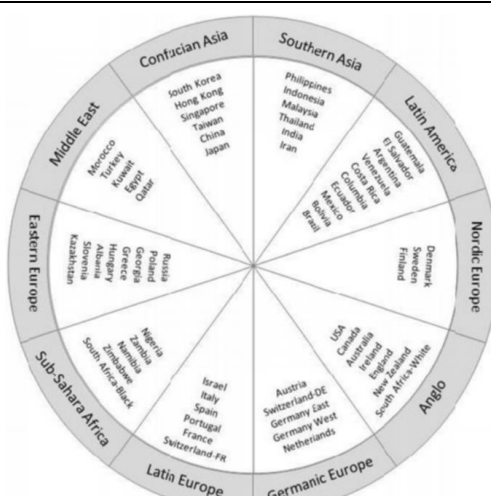


Figure 3: The Wheel diagram

dimensions

Source: Adapted from House et al., 2004

Cultural Dimension	High-score Clusters	Low-Score Clusters
Assertiveness Orientation	Eastern Europe; Germanic Europe	Nordic Europe
Future Orientation	Germanic Europe; Nordic Europe	Eastern Europe; Latin America; Middle East
Gender Egalitarianism	Eastern Europe; Nordic Europe	Middle East
Humane Orientation	Southern Asia; Sub- Saharan Africa	Germanic Europe; Latin Europe
In-Group Collectivism	Confucian Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America; Middle East; Southern Asia	Anglo; Germanic Europe; Nordic Europe
Institutional Collectivism	Anglo; Confucian Asia; Germanic Europe	Eastern Europe; Latin America
Power Distance	No clusters	Nordic Europe
Uncertainty avoidance	Germanic Europe; Nordic Europe	Eastern Europe; Latin America; Middle East

Figure 4: Cultural clusters classified on cultural

Source: Adapted from House et al, 2004

The study also identifies 22 leadership attributes, and focuses on how these attributes relate to the cultural behaviours (Chhokar, Brodbeck, and House, 2007). These are outstanding attributes that are universally accepted but could be practiced differently depending on the cultural setting of the organisation in question. For instance, while quick and approximate decisions are an exhibition of decisiveness in the United States and other low power distance societies; In high power distance cultures or countries like France, decisiveness could mean being more precise and deliberate. Marked as an extension of the Hofstede's framework, the GLOBE study revealed that some attributes are universally applicable (trustworthy, honesty and foresight) while others are culturally contingent.

Trustworthy	Foresight	Positive	Confidence builder
Intelligent	Administrative skills	Excellence oriented	Win-win pb. solver
Just	Plans ahead	Dynamic	Motivational
Decisive	Communicative	Coordinator	Honest
Encouraging	Motive arouser	Dependable	Effective bargainer
Informed	Team builder		

Figure 5: GLOBE study - 22 leadership attributes

Source: Adapted from House et al, 2004

The GLOBE study is noted to be complexity, making its applicability for organisations difficult. This is due to multiple, and at times, overlapping variables they analyse (Osland, 2013). Notwithstanding, it has a broader scope in terms empirical depth and coverage. It covers almost all continents, and thus easier to relate and apply if carefully adapted. Leaders could well benefit from the use of the GLOBE study if they focus on sections that apply to them to understand and adapt. They could also consider improving on their technological intelligence in this rising Artificial intelligence era.

In conclusion, the attitudes and perceptions of organisation's teams members vary by their culture or environments in which they are, or grew up. Knowing these dimensions guides management in aligning leadership strategies to the cultural values and perceptions of their teams. This will in turn motivate satisfaction and performance of the group. Knowing the cultural perspective of staff is necessary but alone not sufficient for managing multinational /cross-cultural team in the 21st century. Leaders may need to develop their global mindset, and improve on their technological intelligence and system thinking capabilities to manage the multinational, and culturally diverse teams.

Leadership in multinational teams

Leadership cannot be overlooked in managing multinational teams, especially for an aim towards reaching shared goals. Rockstuhl et al., (2011) revealed that the culturally intelligent transformational leaders are effective in this recent dynamic cultural and multinational organisational environment. They create a sense of collective identity through their competencies in motivating their team, prioritising a shared vision, and

providing individualized assistance to team members (Bass and Avolio, 1994). This increases commitment and cohesion among the multinational team, impacting satisfaction and overall organisational performance consequently. The Servant leadership style is also mostly acceptable in multinational organisational environments due to its ideology of employee empowerment, empathy and community (Eva et al., 2019). These variables create a sense of involvement and a psychologically safe environment where the leader accepts the teams' shortcomings as learning opportunities, empower them for stretched goals through team building strategies. Servant leaders are more effective in collectivist contexts. In contrast, Transactional leadership style may not do well in many multinational / culturally diverse settings due to its strictness to rules, structure and rewards (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2013). It is more effective in high-power distance settings like Germany or France. This style anchors more on

Thus, a leaders' flexibility in adapting their style to the cultural and leadership expectations of the multinational team he leads informs their effectiveness. They could also consider to improving their knowledge in contemporary technological tools that predominantly enhance communication and predicts cross-cultural behaviours among cross-cultural groups.

Team Satisfaction and Performance outcomes in multinational context

The multinational team's perception about inclusion, leaders' empathy, respect and fairness with the group highly impact group satisfaction and performance (Stahl et al., 2010). Edmondson (1999), in addition, highlighted psychological safety as an important variable to the satisfaction of multicultural / cross-cultural teams. Thus, employees are motivated to give their best when they feel valued in a fair environment that allows for calculated risks taking and making mistakes so long as they are geared towards reaching organisational goals. Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007) however revealed that a diverse team, if not managed, can negatively affect the multinational team's performance.

The multinational team's performance outcomes are improved by the safety of working environment, the leader's empathy and competency in understanding the groups values, and involving them in planning and decision making. Additionally, the cultural intelligence of the leader, training of the cross-cultural team, and implementing policies that motivates cohesion among the multinational team could produce synergistic outcome (Thomas and Peterson, 2017).

Gaps in literature

Some gaps noted in literature on this topic include the following. Hofstede's framework, noted for, among other criticism, being outdated, static and overlook in-country differences, continue to be the foundational framework for many studies on cross-cultural and multinational team management (Beugelsdijk, Kostova and Roth, 2017). With the exception of the GLOBE study, much scholarship is based on Western multinational companies virtually sidelining Africa, Latin America and other continents, limiting the applicability of study outcomes (Michailova, 2017). Additionally, there have been limited studies on virtual multinational teams, digital-first multinational corporations and digital collaboration (Gilson et al., 2015).

In conclusions, Hofstede's dimensions, Trompenaars' dimensions and the GLOBE study provide useful insight for understanding on how global leaders could effectively lead in cross-cultural and multinational teams. Even though they have been criticised by different literature, when applied contextually, it produces good results. Also, the global leader's cultural intelligence, maintaining a psychologically safe environment, appreciation of the teams' dynamics, expectations and their values, leader's flexibility and adaptability, technological intelligence have been effective competencies needed for organisational success in multinational organisations today. An effective leader in a multinational environment, thus need to leverages on the different perspective of their teams and shape their dynamics toward common organisational outcomes.

Additionally, subsequent reviews could consider broadening their scope to cover Africa and other continents (beyond the west). They could also consider addressing the rising virtual contexts of traditional multinational teams and digital -first multinational teams. A deeper study needs to be done on technology-based cross-cultural learning

II. Literature Review

Cross-cultural leadership has been a critical competence within Multinational corporations who seek to leverage on the capabilities of culturally diverse teams in reaching their goals. These corporation's outcome and employee satisfaction in multinational/multicultural environments are dependent predominantly on the leadership style and the cultural intelligence of the leader.

This literature review seeks to analyse the key theories and developments in cross-cultural leadership, cultural intelligence,

Theoretical Foundations of Cross-Cultural Leadership

Cultural dimension Theories

Cross cultural leadership could be theoretically understood through an indebt analysis of cultural dimension theories. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension theory, Trompenaars's Seven Dimensions of culture (1997) and the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) have been the base research theories for Cross-cultural leadership. They discuss how culture influences the effectiveness of leaders and performance of staff in organisations.

Hofstede's cultural dimension

Even though, Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension theory remains influential in analysing the national and organisational culture and their impact on the success of organisations, there have been several opinions and counter opinions aimed at expanding and refining those concepts. Jan, Alshare and Lane (2024) considered how Hofstede's cultural dimensions are making impact technology acceptance behaviours across cultural environment and nationalities. They elucidated the dynamism in Hofstede's power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions when they are applied in a digital work environment. Anglani, Pennetta and Reaiche (2023) concluded that decision making processes and communication patterns are affected in multinational organizations whose staff have supporting digital tools, technologies, flexibility to work remotely, on-site or both. They highlighted the need for leaders to embrace digital tools, cultivate a digital mindset, and uphold a balance in cultural intelligence and digital competence in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment.

Some literatures have criticised the bias in Hofstede's dimension including the limited sample to IBM and to the West; his static view of culture which is highly dynamic with technology, migration and globalization especially in this contemporary world (Fang, 2022; Taras, Kirkman and Steel, 2010; McSweeney, 2022),

Trompenaars' cultural dimensions

Sattorovich (2020) proposed that the Universalism-particularism dimension (from Trompenaars's seven cultural dimensions) has become more complex in organisational settings and that need to balance global standards with local adaptations. Their study underscored that successful cross-cultural leaders adopt adaptive cultural intelligence that considers cultural exceptions in some local circumstances, yet maintaining global standards. Successful global leaders uphold objectivity and impartiality (universal approach), while they maintain trust and employee satisfaction by considering relationships, context in special circumstances (Taras, 2015).

The GLOBE study

Additionally, the influence of the GLOBE study continues to dominate contemporary research in cross-cultural leadership. Originally researching into the impact of cultural values on leadership across 62 countries, the GLOBE study does not only discuss nine cultural dimensions, it also draws a distinction between "as is" cultural practices (people's current practice, behaviour) and "should be" values (expected practices or behaviour). Javidan et al., (2021) follow-up research in 127 nations revealed that cultural values impacting effective cross-cultural leadership, post pandemic-organisational context, has shifted to employee performance orientation and employee. Their findings highlighted two major dimensions: Humane Orientations which describes fairness, empathy and concerns, and performance orientations dimension comprising innovations, achievements, and results.

The GLOBE study draws the difference between cultural values and practices, thus, advancing Hofstede's framework. While Hofstede's dimensions are static, Dorfman et al., (2012) identified contingent attributes of leaders as described in the GLOBE study, concluding that the effectiveness of a cross-cultural leader varies by context. This confirms contemporary literature stance that culture and its values are not static, it is currently adapting to sustainability, performance and humane orientation Javidan et al., (2021). Venaik and Brewer (2016) on the contrary criticised the GLOBE study as underestimating within-country variation and

stereotyping cultures due to its reliance on survey-based national scores. These limitations and recent study suggestions draw attention to the need for a more wholistic and flexible framework.

Analytically, Hofstede's and GLOBE study do not completely explain cross-cultural team contexts; they risk stereotyping, and may not adequately fit into contemporary culturally diverse team settings that is dominated by technology and Artificial intelligence.

Cross-cultural Leadership theories and their evolution

Today, cross-cultural leadership theories have developed beyond describing, mapping and explaining cultural differences within organisations and countries, to prescribing models and attitudes that guides leaders in being effective in diverse cultural environments.

Contemporary adaptive Cross-Cultural Leadership models propose that leaders should exhibit cultural awareness, emotional regulation, contextual adaptation and behavioural flexibility competencies, in order to be effective in their global leadership (Tsai, 2022). The model combines cultural intelligence and situational leadership principles in their leadership model. They suggested continuous learning and adjustment of the global leaders' leadership behaviour (to the dynamic cultural contexts) as critical keys to promoting satisfaction and performance the multinational corporation.

Also, Zhang and Zhang (2025) concept of cultural paradoxes in leadership has been influential in cross-cultural leadership recently. Their study reveals how successful leaders create a conducive atmosphere for multi-cultural staff through their competence in holding antagonistic cultural concepts (paradoxes) at the same time. Successful global leaders leverage on these paradoxes to creativity, flexibility, organisation's resilience in the global arena, and employee satisfaction in multinational organisations.

Cultural Intelligence: A Critical Competency for cross-cultural leaders

Aside adaptability, cultural intelligence (CQ) is noted as an important competency leaders need in managing culturally diverse teams. Rockstuhl et al., (2011) demonstrated a positive relationship between CQ and the effectiveness of cross-cultural leaders, through effective conflict resolution and management of cultural friction. Leaders with high CQ create psychological safety that positively relates with employee satisfaction and organisational performance (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010). Similarly, According to Davaei, Gunkel and Veglio (2022), cross-cultural leaders with higher CQ exhibit competences which results in team cohesion and bridge cultural gaps, leading to enhanced performance in their organisations.

Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualised CQ as comprising behavioural, motivational, metacognitive, and cognitive dimensions. Cognitive CQ discusses how abreast leaders are with the cultural values, norms and practices. Metacognitive CQ is the competence to simultaneously regulate and reflect cultural ideologies during conversations. Motivational CQ is the desire and confidence to engage with staff from different cultural backgrounds. Behavioural CQ describes the leaders' ability to appropriately adapt to behaviours in multinational environments.

Rockstuhl and Van Dyne (2018) however criticized Earley and Ang's (2003) conceptualization model of CQ as lacking consensus and modelling guidance. Rockstuhl and Van Dyne (2018) added that the initial evidence of Earley and Ang's (2003) conceptualization has not been reproduced in other similar researches on CQ. They also criticised CQ as difficult to consistently measure. Notwithstanding, this digital age should compel leaders to improve on their digital skills and virtual skills in order to stay more relevant in the cross-current cultural business environment.

Contemporary Leadership styles in Multicultural environments

Applying traditional leadership styles in multicultural environments has not been effective study in contemporary research (House et al., 2004). Among other contemporary leadership styles that have proven promising in cross-cultural settings are Transformational leadership style, Servant leadership style and Inclusive Leadership styles.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leaders, introduced by Burns (1978) is an ongoing process where "leaders and followers raise on another to higher levels of morality and motivation beyond self-interest to serve collective interests" (Givens, 2008). According to Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leaders transcend cultural barriers due to their aim at inspiring shared vision and intellectual capabilities. This style motivates followers via encouraging innovation, setting clear stretch vision, and showing interest in staff personal development and needs through effective role modelling (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013). Their attitudes positively relate with the satisfaction of followers; not ignoring the influence of cultural moderations on this positive relationship (Caza et al., 2021).

Servant leadership

Servant Leadership style has also proved its effectiveness in cross-cultural environments. According to Sendjaya et al., (2008), the style anchors on the leaders' ability to empower followers; the leaders also exhibit empathy for the team, making staff feel leaders as part of them. This motivates their satisfaction and gets them on to do more towards organisational satisfaction. Servant leaders are effective and appreciated universally but could manifest uniquely in diverse cultural environments (van Dierendonck 2011). In Individualistic cultures, for instance, they focus on personal development and staff empowerment, while their effectiveness manifests in their investment in the harmony of the group. Building his team produces synergistic results for the organisation as a whole. Hunter et al. (2013) suggested that servant leaders in multinational organisations should consider the development preferences of stakeholders and the service expectations of the different cultures they are.

Inclusive leadership

Inclusive leadership maintains cohesion in diversity. It is the "ability to create environments where all team members feel valued, heard and able to contribute their unique perspectives while working towards common goals" (Shore et al., 2011). This environment, thus, provides an environment where the ideas of followers are heard and inculcated in the organisational strategy towards reaching organisational goals. Their research revealed the tripod relationship between inclusive leadership, cultural diversity and performance.

The various contemporary literatures have revealed that leader's effectiveness varies by cultural context. While Transformational leadership focuses on motivating performance through enforcing shared vision, Servant leadership wins the trust and commitment of his team through his empathy, humility, and goal of community building. Even though, the cultural context primarily determines the best model, Inclusive and adaptive theories would best be effective in managing multinational firms. Adaptive leadership models are flexible to the cultural context; Inclusive leadership models build a participating atmosphere for work, highlighting the need for cohesion.

Effective communication and Conflict resolution in Multicultural teams.

- Communication In cross-cultural environments

Effective communication cannot be overemphasized in cross-cultural leadership. Notwithstanding, it comes with its challenges especially in managing multinational firms. Luring (2011) identified three fundamental communication challenges: linguistic barriers, non-verbal communication disparities, and contextual misunderstanding, in their examination of communication patterns in multinational teams. Successful cross-cultural leaders combine all communication channels to ensure that their messages are clearly decoded by staff across diverse cultures.

Additionally, technology has also played a role in enhancing the cross-cultural leaders' communication across cultures and barriers. This ranges from the myriads of language translators and interpreters and digital platforms that facilitate communication among leaders and cross-cultural team members especially in remote environments, Newman, Ford and Marshall (2020). Their findings also highlight the need for the cross leaders to also consider the negative effects of technology in their management, including its effect on trust and relationship development. Beside the need to develop their Cultural intelligence, R  th and Netzer (2020) suggests the need for leaders also develop their digital cultural intelligence on how to leverage on the advantages of digital tools and artificial intelligence in executing their cross-cultural leadership duties.

Cross-cultural leaders, thus, have to analyse the effects of both face-to-face communication and Virtual communication considering the cultural context they are in. Virtual communication may have taken dominance in many multinational organisational settings today due to staff preference, geographic reasons and flexibility in contemporary work culture. Leaders may consider a hybrid system or ensure consistent communication and update from remote workers; this improves the cohesion and satisfaction among the group members.

- Resolving Conflicts across cultures

Conflicts are bound to erupt in all business environments especially, cross-cultural setting. Its management informs management of the leader's cultural competence, and its careful resolution could enhance cohesion and install a serene working environment for productivity.

Global leaders need to implement approaches that recognise the resolution preferences and diverse conflict styles of various staff in different cultures (Mayer, Vanderheiden and Wong 2020). Their research

revealed that, In America for in instance, member prefer the competing style of conflict resolution, contrasted to those in the Australia. According to the studies, Australians prefer more of collaboration and compromising conflict resolution style. However, Indians and other Asian countries rather accommodate and avoid confrontations. Koreans and Chinese compromise and avoid. Japanese avoid and accommodate while Malaysians prefer to Integrate and compromise. Also, Chamorro-Premuzic, Smith and Garcia-Cabera (2022) identified the role of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution, emphasizing how employees are motivated, and their trust enhanced for collaboration for productivity, when leaders are aware of their emotions (EI-self-awareness) and manage their emotions.

Thomas-Kilman Conflict Resolution Model explains five conflict resolution strategies: Collaboration, accommodation, Compromising, avoiding and competing. The Y axis depicts the assertive, while the X axis measures cooperativeness (Thomas and Kilmann, 2008). Each strategy is thus a blend of assertiveness and cooperativeness. Staff in cultures that uses the Avoiding strategy (Low cooperativeness and Low Assertiveness) totally ignore conflicts by not expressing their concerns or addressing the concerns of others. In cultures where Competing strategies (Low cooperation, high assertiveness) thrives, like the Americas, winning or domineering is the goal of parties involved. Accommodating (low assertiveness, high cooperativeness) strategies involves cultures who resolve conflicts by prioritizing the concerns of the other party. Indians are noted for this. Another strategy is Compromising (Moderate assertiveness, moderate cooperativeness) which aims at reaching a consensus at the middle grounds.

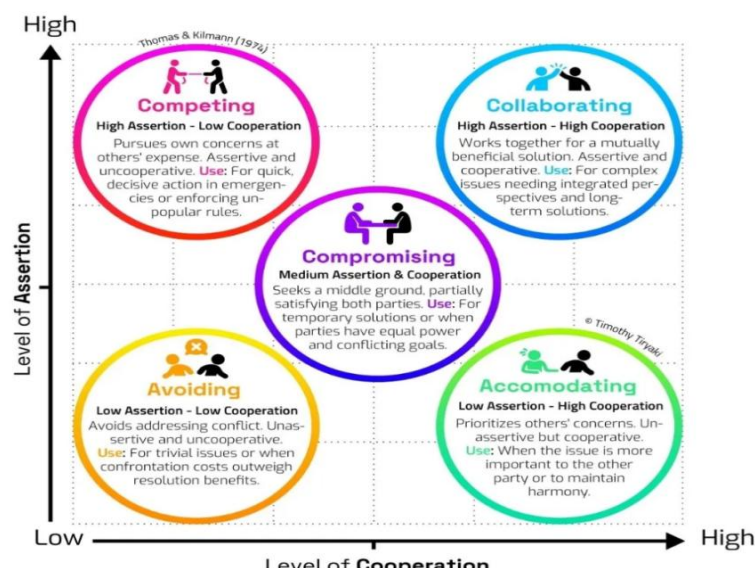


Figure 6: Thomas-Kilman Conflict Resolution Model (Image created by Thomas Tiriyaki)
 Source: Adopted from Thomas and Kilmann (2008)

Collaboration (High assertiveness, high cooperativeness) is the most preferred strategy in Thomas-Kilman's Conflict Resolution Model. It is known as the WIN-WIN strategy in Thomas-Kilman Conflict Resolution Model; both parties fully address the concerns of both parties in a cultural conflict.

Cross-cultural leaders may however not adopt Collaboration and universal conflict strategies in whole; they may need to consider the conflict resolution approaches in the cultural settings they are and balance between the two.

Organisational performance and Employee satisfaction in cross-cultural environments.

Factors that influence employees' satisfaction

Cultural diversity

Stahl et al.'s (2010) review highlights cultural diversity as an important factor that both enhances and detracts organisational performance. The effects include innovation, cultural intelligence and personal growth, conflict resolution, enhanced decision making and employee retention. On the other hand, cultural diversity could cause resistance to change, conflict and tension, communication barriers. Their study concluded that leaders could promote fairness and equality, training in cultural competencies in order to leverage on the diversity of cross-cultural colleagues. Organisations, as well, need to maintain an inclusive organisational

culture that involves all members in decision making. Effective cross-cultural leadership enhance the satisfaction and performance of multicultural teams.

Psychological safety:

Additionally, Psychological safety influences satisfaction and performance in the team. Several contemporary studies have researched on psychological safety and its impact on employee satisfaction and performance in multicultural environments. Initially introduced by Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis in 1965, and conceptualized by Edmondson (1999), Psychological safety is the belief that it is safe to take risks and make mistakes so long as they are geared towards reaching organisational goals. The team is thus motivated to experiment with new ideas and take calculated risk that have the potential to improve effectiveness and efficiency of current processes (Frazier et al., 2017). Their study added that team members in a psychologically safe environments are motivated to contribute meaningfully as they grow personally and professionally from their mistakes and accommodated risks. Edmondson's (1999; 2018) study emphasized that teams in psychologically safe environments learn from their mistakes and adapt to challenges through effective collaboration in tackling challenges.

This environment should not be misconstrued for irresponsibility and negligence, or reduce the standard of performance of the team. Multicultural teams working in psychologically safe environment should rather leverage on the comfortable environment to reach high standards and maximum performance, Edmondson (2018). He developed a chart on the relationship between Performance standards and psychological safety.

	Low Standards	High Standards
High Psychological Safety	<i>Comfort Zone</i>	<i>Learning & High Performance Zone</i>
Low Psychological Safety	<i>Apathy Zone</i>	<i>Anxiety Zone</i>

Figure 7: 2 x 2 Psychological Safety and Performance Standards model

Source: Edmondson, 2019

The vertical / Psychological safety axis depicts the extent to which risks; team members' mistakes are tolerated. It also includes their ability speak up. The Horizontal / Standard axis plots the organisational goals and performance expectation. In the Comfort zone team members do not feel challenged, showing low results and innovation. Teams in the Apathy Zone (low psychology safety and low safety) neither tolerate to mistakes, take risks nor motivated to reach set standards. In the anxiety zone (High standards and low psychological safety), high performance standards are set for team members, yet members are not free to experiment with mistakes, neither can they speak up. These environments stresses members, impeding innovation, satisfaction, potential and organisational performance. Lastly, Learning and High-Performance zone is the ideal environment, according to Edmondson (2019). In this quadrant, members are encouraged to innovate, speak up and make mistakes, in their goal to reach the high-performance standards set.

Cultural diversity and Team performance

In their quest for inclusion and equity, organisations have resorted to workforce diversity. In effect, organisations are keen on the impact of this cultural diversity on their performance (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Cox and Blake, 1991). Even though, corporate expectations and several earlier literatures on cultural diversity and performance have shown a positive relationship between the two, a meta-analysis reveals otherwise (Wallrich et al., 2024). Thus, cultural diversity alone cannot guarantee organisational success. The effectiveness of a cultural diversity team is dependent on the cultural intelligence and competence of the leader, team's motivation and how organisational processes are managed

Pieterse et al. (2013) developed and tested goal orientations to identify the relationship between cultural diversity and performance. They identified Goal orientation (moderator) and Information elaboration (underlining process) as the benefits of performance in a cross-cultural environment. They discovered that teams that are learning-oriented can easily adapt to diverse perspectives. This improves performance in multicultural

teams. However, in cross-cultural environments where members resist engagement, cultural diversity tends to reduce performance. This suggests that leaders who motivate learning goals and reduce avoidance climates motivate team performance in cross-cultural environments.

Culturally diverse teams in itself does not produce results. They positively affect performance provided other additional conditions are met: the cultural intelligence of the leader; motivational and processual factors and a participating / inclusive team environment.

Hybrid and Virtual management of cultural teams

The impact of digital transformation on cross cultural leadership

Traditional face to face team management was predominant until the struck of the COVID 19, which forced the remote work into many working environments. This, aside the speed and flexibility of work, has created new challenges to global leaders. Osland and Bird, (2017), discovered that working remotely increases elucidates some cultural differences while it covers others. In this view, cross-cultural leaders have to build their competency in digital cultural intelligence. This includes strategies in building relationships virtually, adapting to timing difference in communication, and adapting to technology that facilitate virtual meetings.

Digital transformation has both positively and negatively affected the operations of multinational organisations, redefining cross-cultural leadership practices. Several staff work remotely in the current dispensation of work environment. In these environments, technology bridges effective communication, collaboration and trust between leaders and virtual and hybrid teams (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Effective cross-cultural Leaders develop intercultural sensitivity and competencies in technology to stay relevant in this digital era (Davaei et al., 2022). Digital tools could pose negative effects on multinational even though it is known to reduce geographical barriers. Caligiuri et al. (2020) identified how digital tools amplifies the differences in conflict resolution, leadership expectations and conflict resolution. The advantages of digital tools on organisations could be well harnessed if leaders adapt to cultural elements of their staff. This improves creativity, psychological safety and employee satisfaction that impacts performance (Sacavem et al., 2025).

This implies that digital transformation is attained, and organisational performance could only improve, if leaders leverage on their intercultural competencies and develop their digital sensitivity and abilities to meet the technological shift.

Assessing the effectiveness of Cross-cultural Performance measurement criteria

Many literatures have suggested difference criteria in measuring the effectiveness of cross-cultural teams, yet there has since not been a generally accepted measure of performance across cultures (Wildman et al., 2022). Matsumoto and Hang (2013); Lima et al., (2016) suggests that measuring the leaders' adaptability to diverse cultural teams' ideologies is a good measure of the performance of the team, Okpara (2016); Chen et al. (2014) suggested the ability and willing of the leader and the team to adjust to cultural trends, while Jyoti and Kour (2017).

Wildman et al. (2022) additionally suggests that instead of multicultural/multinational organisations focusing on traditional performance, they could consider implementing measures that reflects cross-cultural competencies. Among other criteria, measures that assesses effective communication across cultures, focusing on clarity and unambiguous information to staff in other cultures (Tenzer et al., 2014). Also, inculcating the degree at which leaders include members in decision making in the performance measurement criteria is viable a measure for cross-cultural team. Nishii and Mayer (2009) identified how patterns of inclusion impact turnover and cultural diversity. The degree and availability and processes of accessing relevant information and knowledge sharing could also be a criterion for measuring the performance of cross-cultural groups (Pieterse et al., 2013). Other criteria include: Cultural adaptability and Intelligence (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015); degree of psychological safety (Edmondson 2019); Effectiveness of conflict resolution processes and staff perception of fairness in resolving conflicts (Adham, 2023).

Future and emerging trends in cross-cultural leadership

Cultural Intelligence and Artificial intelligence

Recent literature is exploring the intersection of cross-cultural leadership and artificial intelligence. Zmire and Chen (2024) analysed the effect of Artificial intelligence (AI) on cross-cultural leadership competencies through technology. They revealed the impact of online language learning experience on multinational organisation.

AI would not replace the cross-cultural leader; it can facilitate cultural intelligence by identifying cross-cultural signals, analysing them and suggesting remedies towards sustainable productivity (Sokolova, 2024). Cross-cultural leader should thus sharpen their competence in the use of AI tools. Some studies have however

criticised the use of AI in Cross cultural leadership, noting that AI could project less competent leaders who have built competence only in the use of AI tools seem culturally competent even when they genuinely do not possess the basic competencies that cross-cultural leadership requires (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025).

This suggests that the effective cross-cultural leadership in future will be dependent on objective cross-cultural human judgement, and their competencies in technological tools.

Cross-cultural leadership in the contemporary generation

There has been the introduction of new dynamics to cross-cultural leadership in recent organisational management. Zehetner et al. (2022) study on Gen Z in Europe on their preferred leadership styles and orientations revealed that Gen Z in Ukraine highly expected that motivation is tied to transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Ukraine is generally characterized by collectivist orientation and high-power distance. However, Gen Z participants of Austria (characterized by individualistic orientation) expected transactional leadership style in their work environment. Additionally, Lifintsev et al. (2019) revealed that even though language barriers and other barriers exist, Gen Z are willing to build competencies in cross-cultural communication in order to integrate effectively in culturally diverse environments.

Effective cross-cultural leadership should thus build competencies and adopt to strategies that considers generations expectations on leadership.

Cross-cultural leadership and Sustainability

Contemporary literatures are researching into the relationship between cross-cultural leadership and sustainability (Gabriunas et al., 2023). Global attention to environmental and organisational sustainability has introduced the need for cross-cultural leaders to adapt to strategies that aligns their style with the sustainability priorities of their cultural environments (Bhatia and Whig, 2022). This suggests that cross cultural leaders build competencies in sustainable global leadership to fit in into the contemporary global business environment.

Sustainability benefits organisations through its long-term orientation of preserving resources. To maintain a wholesome overview, there is the need for leaders to balance the long-term benefits of sustainability with the short-term performance indicators of multinational firms.

III. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that is adopted to research into effective cross-cultural leadership and multinational team management, with focus on contemporary strategies for improving the satisfaction and performance of employees in multinational firms. Specifically, the chapter explains the philosophy of the research, the research approach and design, sampling strategy, methods applied in data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and the limitation of the study. It further justifies the basis for selecting and rejecting methods, explains the practicality of the study, and discusses the limitation of the research. The research objective and questions in the earlier chapter guides the selection of appropriate methods to use.

The study aims at discussing the impact of cross-cultural leadership strategies on employee satisfaction and performance. In this case, a methodology that highlights meaning and lived experience is appropriate because the constructs are cultural, socially embedded, subjective (Tracy, 2020, Braun and Clarke, 2021). This method will also adopt systematic methodology, ensuring credible and rigorous research and practical relevance (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Research Philosophy

Research Philosophy refers to the perception that guides knowledge generation, interpretation and understanding (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Interpretivism and Phenomenological orientation underpin the philosophy of this study. The Interpretivist paradigm posits that reality and knowledge are respectively dependent on human interpretation and participant's perspectives to their experiences (Bryman, 2021; Silverman, 2020). This is more suitable for this study and qualitative analysis because leadership effectiveness, employee satisfaction and cultural intelligence are dependent on personal experiences and cultural norms. It is also suitable because of its value for in-depth analysis, nuance and individual's interpretation and perspectives of their experiences (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018).

In contrast to the Interpretivism is the Positivism approach which is often perceives reality as measurable through quantitative models which emphasises objectivity and generalisation (Neuman, 2014). The positivism approach may not fit well into this study because it would delimit the cultural and experiential dynamics that the study projects, to statistical measures. In addition, the Pragmatism and Critical Realism approach were also set aside. Even though pragmatism appreciates "what works", it is often skewed towards mixed-methods which is not feasible within the scope and timeframe of this dissertation. The Critical realism was also rejected: though it

provides an in-depth explanation and understanding meaning, it does not establish the causal mechanisms (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020).

Also, this study is situated in the Phenomenological approach, which focuses on uncovering individual's lived experience and their perspective on social phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). This approach aligns with the objective of the study in revealing the perception of employees and leaders in multinational corporations on cross-cultural practices.

Research Approach

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which is more suitable for researching on complex, subjective and contextual phenomena such as cultural intelligence, leadership experience and effectiveness, employee satisfaction and culture (Tracy, 2020). These variables cannot also be completely measured statistically (Silverman, 2020). Furthermore, this research would collect data from primary sources with the aim of exploring ideas, perspectives and philosophies rather than confirming theories. This also make qualitative approach better suited for this review.

On the hand, even though Quantitative approaches allow for statistical generalisation, they are not well suited for this study because they do not totally consider subjective experiences and perception of employees and leaders (Bryman and Bell, 2021). A regression analysis, for instance, could measure relationship between leadership style and the level of satisfaction; it would not analyse how leaders' perception, experience, cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence impact organisational results (Bell, Harley and Bryman, 2022). Mixed-methodology, even though, allows for a combination of quantitative data and qualitative insight, it was not adopted because it requires more time and resources (Mackey, Bryfonski, 2018). These resources are limited variables for this research.

Research design

The study would use exploratory and multiple-case qualitative design. Exploratory research because it is appropriate for investigating areas and research questions that have not been studied in depth (Stebbins, 2001). This design allows for in-depth examination for translating global leadership and cross-cultural team management theories into results-oriented practices, as noted in the problem statement (Yin, 2018).

The design also employs Questionnaires and Semi-structured interviews to respectively collect data from staff in diverse cultures and cross-cultural leaders and managers in multinational environments. This approach incorporates data from dual sources - it considers both the perspectives of manager/leaders and employees - thus enhancing the credibility of the findings. This is called triangulation in research (Varpio et al., 2017).

Sampling strategy

Population and sampling Framework

The study targets cross-cultural leaders and managers, and culturally diverse employees working within Multinational corporations, particularly in the technology, manufacturing and finance sectors who mostly rely on global teams.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling and Snowball sampling are used in this study. Purposive sampling is effective for deliberately identifying cross cultural staff, experienced leaders and team managers (Palinkas et al., 2015); Snowball sampling leverages on referrals from initial contacts to access further participants of similar or higher calibre, access to whom could be challenging (Noy, 2008).

Sampling Size

Data saturation is the basic principle in choosing sample size in qualitative research, especially where no new themes emerge (Guest et al., 2006). This study anticipates sampling 10 global leaders and 30 employees (40 participants in total) from multinational corporations (traditional or digital-first multinationals). 40 participants are more than the minimum - 12 - suggested by Guest et al. (2006), that are sufficient to achieve data saturation. According to Mason (2010), saturation in quantitative analysis could be reached with 20-30 participants. The sample size allows for exploration of perspectives, while it balances depth with breadth, and maintains manageability. There is also the need to manage time and resources constraint of the dissertation, hence concluding on this number of participants.

Data collection Methods

- Semi-structured Interviews

Aside the fact that Semi-structured interviews ensure meaningful exploration of perspectives, it covers core questions across participants and allows for flexibility (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The interview will probe deeper into: the leaders' experience and strategies in managing multinational organisations; their challenges in managing culturally diverse teams; their perception of their impact on the performance and satisfaction of employees. The interviews will be conducted virtually, via zoom) each lasting about 20mins. Conversations will be recorded and transcribed having received the consent of participants.

- **Questionnaire / Survey**

Questionnaires will be administered to culturally diverse employees in multinational corporations. The questionnaire will be a combination of closed-ended items (using Likert scales), and open-ended questions that allows comprehensive narrative. Questionnaire would complement the depth of understanding that interviews provide. Questionnaires will solicit for a broad perspective of the global teams' experiences while the interviews will give the depth of the experiences (Flick, 2014)

Generally, Interviews provide in-depth insight of the cross-cultural team's perspective, while questionnaire gives a broader view of staff experience. Through Triangulation, the study will integrate data collected from both the interviews and questionnaires. The findings or outcomes from both methods are juxtaposed and contrasted to enrich understanding (Flick, 2022).

Data Analysis Methodology

Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework, thematic analysis will be employed to analyse the collected data from participants. The framework includes

- Familiarisation with data through detailed reading of transcripts and relevant information.
- Generating initial codes to make identifying units meaningful and easier
- Searching for themes which involve grouping codes into broader patterns.
- Reviewing themes to ensure that there is coherence in the data and outcome
- Defining and naming themes in order to capture their essence
- Producing the report illustrating quotes and thematic analysis.

Microsoft excel and NVivo will assist in coding and managing the data through recognition of pattern and for managing large data). Specifically, the NVivo will ease qualitative data retrieval, identify patterns across open-ended questionnaire responses and interviews responses. It also assists in visualising the relationship between codes and themes. On the other hand, responses from closed-ended questionnaire will be managed by Microsoft Excel, which will also highlight frequency distributions to be compared with qualitative insights. Interpretation of themes will be done in light of the theoretical frameworks and contemporary leadership theories underpinning the study, including Hofstede (2001); Trompenaars (1997); House et al. (2004); transformational and servant leadership theories (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Sendjaya et al. (2008).

Quantitative statistical methods, and Content analysis were not employed in this study. This is because Quantitative statistical methods do not capture nuanced meanings in lived experiences which is core to this research. Content analysis on the other hand is comparatively limited in depth and flexibility in interpreting meanings, making thematic analysis better suited for analysing data of this study (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Practicalities of the Research

Some practical considerations that shape the research include; the challenge in gaining access to multinational leaders (snowballing aims at mitigating this). There is also a limited timeframe for conducting the entire research (within two months period). Fortunately, the use of communication technology for virtual interviews facilitate participation and overcome logistical challenges. Lastly, many participants are not native speakers and this could breed language barriers and could also constraint participation and practicality of the research. To resolve this, questions will be precise.

Trustworthiness, Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are replaced by Trustworthiness in qualitative research. Trustworthiness is assessed through four criteria as reveal by Shenton (2004): Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility would be achieved through triangulation of questionnaires and interviews, peer debriefing and member checking where summaries of participants' responses are presented to them to review (Shenton, 2004). Regarding Transferability, stakeholder would assess applicability to other settings due to the study's extensive description of participants and organisational contexts. Dependability is achieved through maintaining an audit

trail through documenting all relevant processes, findings, decision, and interpretations. Lastly, on Confirmability, Journaling and data interpretation will be done objectivity and transparently.

Ethical Consideration

The study complies with ethical integrity and principles needed in conducting research involving human participants (Resnik, 2018).

Participants will be fully informed, and their consents formally sought on the aims and procedures of the study. Also, employees' and leaders' data and transcripts will be anonymized and kept confidential; pseudonyms will be implemented in reporting findings. In addition, no participant will be coerced in support of the review; they will as well have the right to withdraw without any undue consequences. Further, customer data will be secured on protected devices, and deleted after the study. Lastly, prior approval will be sought from the appropriate authority of the Research committee (Babbie, 2020).

Limitations of the Methodology

There are some limitations acknowledged, even though the methodology is rigorous: The qualitative nature of the study limits statistical generalisability of the finding, notwithstanding, this qualitative nature provides contextual richness and captures nuanced meanings (Tracy, 2020). Also, there is sampling bias. Purposive and snowball sampling does not give equal opportunity for the entire population to be selected (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Leaders may also reluctantly project their flaws, presenting themselves favourably. Triangulation with employee data would mitigate this limitation. Time constraint is also a limitation to this study. The sample size is limited due to the limited dissertation timeframe. There could also be misinterpretation of participants questions and responses. To mitigate this, the study would use clarified phrases in questionnaire and interview. Lastly, the researcher's cultural bias could also mar the objective analysis and interpretation of participants responses. Peer review and supervisor oversight would limit this risk.

In spite of these limitations, the methodology is well structured to reveal an in-depth and broad insight into global leadership strategies and their impact on employees' satisfaction and organisational outcomes.

This chapter presented the methodological framework for the research. The study anchors on interpretivist and phenomenology philosophies which are better suited for qualitative approach, purposive and snowball sampling, and two-way data collection methods, thematic analysis which are most suitable for capturing and analysing the nuanced experience of cross leadership practices in multinational firms, and addressing the research questions. Trustworthiness and ethical principles are also complied with in this study. Other methodologies were rejected due to their limitations.

Additionally, though there are several limitations to the study, the chosen methodology provides mitigating measures and a robust foundation for gaining better insight into how effective cross-cultural leadership strategies can improve the teams' satisfaction and the performance.

IV. Findings / Analysis / Discussion

4.1 Findings

This chapter explores the key findings that was derived from both the semi-structured interviews and surveys done as part of this research. With the overarching aim of researching into the effectiveness of leadership strategies that impacts multinational/multicultural teams, the data is reported to align the research objectives. A 'Mixed-methods' design was used: Open-ended interviews offered qualitative depth, while closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire provided the width of quantitative insight. In addition, the credibility of the findings was further enhanced by triangulation of responses from both responses from open-ended interviews with leaders of multinational groups and closed-ended survey done with employees of multinational/multicultural organisations. These were in line with that which methodology proposed.

This section first presents the results from the survey, which highlights organisations' respect and perspective on multinational team inclusion, respect for diverse cultures, leadership strategies and practices, and digital tools and their impact on team collaboration. This section continues with qualitative themes from the open-ended responses collected from the interviews.

4.1.1 Quantitative findings from surveys collected from Employees

- Leadership Communication

Respondents, from Africa, Europe and Asia rated the effectiveness of their leaders' communication across diverse cultures. The majority of participants chose 5 (strongly agree) or 4 (Agree), while one-third of them selected either 2 (disagree) or 3 (neutral). This response depicts that while contemporary leadership communication strategy across cultures is gradually being effective, inconsistencies and other communication challenges persists.

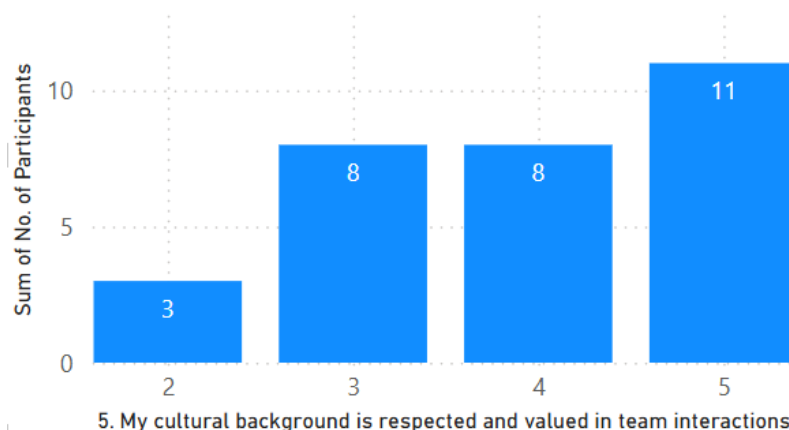
Table 1: Communication Effectiveness across cross-cultural teams		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	0	0%
Disagree (2)	5	17%
Neutral (3)	3	10%
Agree (4)	9	30%
Strongly Agree (5)	11	37%

Source: Author's work, 2025

- **Respect and Inclusion for culture Communication**

The survey asked whether employees felt that their organisations and leaders respected and valued their cultural background, and involved them in decision making. The results showed that even though a majority agreed, a considerable number selected neutral while a minority had negative views on this. This suggests that cultural diversity is appreciated in many organisations today. Notwithstanding, many employees in addition perceive lack of respect and inclusivity and of the team in decision making, suggesting that strategies aimed at accommodating cultural diversity may not be equally implemented by cross-cultural leaders.

Figure 8: Respect for cultural and Inclusivity



Source: Author's work, 2025

Table 2: Cross-cultural Team's involvement in decision making		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	0	0%
Disagree (2)	4	13%
Neutral (3)	8	27%
Agree (4)	7	23%
Strongly Agree (5)	11	37%

Source: Author's work, 2025

- **Leaders' adaptability**

Again, the majority of employees responded in the affirmative when they were asked whether their leaders adapt their leadership style to employees from diverse cultures. This again shows that many cross-cultural leaders flexible in their approach, while a minority of them adhered to their preferred style.

Table 3: Employees perception on leader's adaptability		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	0	0%
Disagree (2)	1	3%
Neutral (3)	7	23%
Agree (4)	14	47%
Strongly Agree (5)	8	27%

Source: Author's work, 2025

- **Psychological safety**

This shows how respondents rated a survey question on whether or not they felt safe to share their opinions and ideas that differ from others'. While the majority of them agreed (4 – 5), a minority disagree (1 – 2) with a huge minority staying neutral (3). This depicts that freedom expressing contrary ideas and opinions depends on the context, the individual or the organisational values and culture.

Table 4: Psychological safety in cross-cultural environments		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	2	7%
Disagree (2)	2	7%
Neutral (3)	6	20%
Agree (4)	10	33%
Strongly Agree (5)	10	33%

Source: Author's work, 2025

- **Team Diversity, Innovation and Problem solving**

Respondents assessed whether a culturally diverse team positively impacted Innovation and Problem Solving. While the majority of the participants agreed (4 - 5), a minority either disagree (2), or stay neutral (3). This highlights that the perceived benefits of a culturally diverse team, even as it paints the setbacks there in working or leading cross-cultural teams.

Table 5: Team diversity and Innovation		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	0	0%
Disagree (2)	4	13%
Neutral (3)	6	20%
Agree (4)	11	37%
Strongly Agree (5)	9	30%

Source: Author's work, 2025

- **Digital collaboration**

Lastly, a question examined whether digital tools (Zoom, Teams) have been effective in supporting collaboration. A third of quarter of the respondents either selected agree (4) or strongly agree (5), showing that technology as an effective enabler for multinational team collaboration is certain. However, this comes with drawbacks in relation to cultural sensitivity of the team.

Table 6: Digital tools and culturally diverse teams		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	1	3%
Disagree (2)	2	7%
Neutral (3)	2	7%
Agree (4)	9	30%
Strongly Agree (5)	16	53%

Source: Author's work, 2025

Summarising employees feedback from the survey; there exit both opportunities and threats in working cross-cultural teams. Employees agreed that their cultural background are generally respected by adaptive global leaders and team members in culturally diverse teams, while they are majorly included in decisions. They added that they felt safe in sharing opposing ideas and communication with their leaders were generally effective. Further, a majority selected that Digital tools facilitated cross-culture/border communication, as well. Notwithstanding, a number chose contrary opinions, signifying the need for global managers and leaders to sacrifice a bit of technical and managerial skills for more effective human-centred strategies that will totally accommodate employees from diverse backgrounds towards higher satisfaction and performance results.

4.1.2 Qualitative findings from Open-Ended responses collected from Interviews

This section presents the major themes identified after coding the open-ended responses and transcripts from interviews with experienced global leaders.

- Cross-cultural challenges

Global leaders were asked some of the challenges they faced in managing multinational/multicultural teams. They responded highlighting Different Time zones coordination difficulties, diverse work style and approach, differences in Cultural perspectives and expectations, Barriers of Communication as the major challenges that persist within their cross-cultural teams. For instance, participants said talking on Barriers of communication

"Sometimes you are working with a team that is speaking French. So, the question is, how are you able to communicate effectively with that team?"

"Sometimes even with fellow English-speaking colleagues from different environments, the tone of your email or voice could be misinterpreted and you need to be able to manage and to navigate some of these conversations"

"Each of these countries have their various unique styles of work and adopting to it with your culture could be a bit of a challenge." "I think on main difficulty is the different mindsets and team's different interpretation to things and actions"

"Sometimes we needed to have meetings at awkward times depending on the time-zone and availability of the stakeholders, or I have meetings at some time that may not be too suitable for me."

These reaffirm that there is a higher probability of misunderstandings and friction within the team due to the differences in cultural perspective and expectations of the team. This depicts difficulty in smooth cooperation and collaboration among cross-cultural teams. Again, this confirms the point of Hofstede (2001) that cultural contexts impact communication. And calls for leaders' conscious efforts and strategies aimed at managing these challenges towards organisational goals.

- Effective Leadership strategies

This theme summarised strategies that leaders employed in managing the negative effects of cultural diversity. Leaders employed collaboration, strictness to organisational culture, team building and inclusion, flexible communication style, respect, personalised attention, empathy, and Technology facilitations in doing this.

Among the responses from cross-cultural leaders on strategies they implement in managing cross-cultural challenges are:

"I make my team feel comfortable coming to me to tell me if there's an issue"

"I found that empathy, active listening, and clear communication worked best to motivate their satisfaction."

"Being firm to my principles – This is the second strategy that has seen success with me. Truth is, nothing goes on if you decide to tolerate everybody's cultural difference. We have an organisational culture, let's all stick to that."

"We used to have a system that if the person speaks French, we are able to have the translated English version and that helps you"

"You need to be a bit more flexible in your communication."

"We leverage on the Microsoft Teams for communicating from different locations"

"Get the input of staff in decision making. My team feel most valued when I involve them in decision making, especially when I take their input."

"Overall, just be transparent and respectful to everyone in the team"

This signifies that many contemporary cross-cultural leaders implemented Nishii and Mayer's (2009) inclusive leadership theory which highlights the need for flexibility, respect and openness in leading diverse teams towards shared goals. Notwithstanding, a few of global leaders stayed rigid to their style and culture and reached their organisational goals. Leaders need to consider other variables besides improving on their soft skills.

- Fairness, satisfaction and Inclusion

Leaders responded that open communication, fairness, empowerment of the team, and implementing effective feedback mechanism are critical global leadership strategies that enhance culturally diverse teams' perception of their value. They feel satisfied and ready to give out their best towards reaching organisational goals. To implement this, leaders said:

"The leader just has to allow for open dialogue and understand what people want. How do they work?"

"As much as possible, I treat my team with all fairness."

"People do not have to feel that they were sidelined because of their culture or their background especially with regards to bonuses." "It's also about being open and transparent when it comes to conversations around promotion."

"One way of making them feel valued is I've always had this leadership style where I expect my teams to take a lot of ownership"

"Regular feedback mechanism, so after each project what is required of you is to seek feedback from the clients and team."

"Motivating your team to take up certain delegated tasks and roles, and ownership of processes is a good way to make them feel valued and satisfied in the team."

These responses suggest that employees feel valued, their satisfaction significantly increase when cross-cultural leaders treat them fairly and empower them for higher roles. Thus, fairness and inclusive practices improve retention and reduces employees' turnover (Shore et al., 2011).

- Effective cross-cultural leadership styles

Many of the leaders interviewed identified with inclusive and transformative leadership as the most effective in managing cross-cultural / multinational teams. However, some leaders saw blending different style of leadership depending on the context, as a better leadership approach in managing cross-cultural teams:

"I rather use bespoke or customised leadership style, because in this contemporary environment, 'a one size fits all approach to leadership' may not be effective. I think one of the key styles a leader needs to adopt to is to be able to tailor leadership style based on teams' needs and the colleague's peculiar circumstances."

This implies that leading cross-cultural teams should be viewed as situational, not necessarily fixed (House et al., 2004).

- Future global leadership competencies

Cross-cultural leaders stated that Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Emotional intelligence (EI), Multilingualism, Innovation and Digital/technological skills are critical skills cross-cultural leader need in order to effectively manage the next generation of employees. Among other competences,

cross-cultural Leaders *"must work on their ability to adapt to different cultural values and perspectives of the team."*

"Cross cultural leaders need emotional intelligent in leading cross-cultural teams"

"The leader should build competency in innovating new ideas and perspective in areas" "Leveraging on Technology and Artificial intelligence to facilitate work and to bridge geographical barriers."

need to ready to learn new languages for effective cross-cultural leadership to fit in. This could curb the language barrier in the long run

“Some of these skills, I believe if you put together, are beyond the technical competences of your job, these are the other things that I believe the soft part of the job that leaders need in today and tomorrow’s work environment”

These competencies (soft skills) complement the technical expertise of leaders towards employee satisfaction and organisational goals (Ang et al., 2007).

- **Digital transformation**

Participants added to the ongoing debate about the mixed impact of digital tools and Artificial Intelligence on cross-cultural teams. They highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of using digital tools and artificial intelligence

“Tools like Teams and Zoom enable real-time collaboration across time zones”

“Also, team members who prioritise family can balance that with work from home and take care of family activities as well”

“There is risk attached to AI; being said, data protection issues.”

There have also stories of “depressions and all of that as a result of people staying or working from home and not meeting their colleagues in person.”

This confirms that contemporary technologies in Artificial Intelligence create opportunities and risks for leadership which need to be well managed (Purvanova, 2014).

In summary, the findings in this session presented a representation of diverse challenges the cross-cultural leader face in multinational firms, strategies aimed at improving employee satisfaction, and performance outcomes from implemented strategies.

4.2 Analysis

This section gives an analysis of findings from the interview and survey, relating them to the research questions. This aims at discussing the diverse variables and strategies of cross-cultural / global leaders and how they affect the satisfaction and performance of their team. A thematic approach is adopted around four main research questions. As mentioned in the methodology, triangulation strategy is adopted to compare results from the difference sources (Fetters and Freshwater, 2015).

4.2.1 RQ1: What are the main challenges that leaders face in managing cross-cultural teams and multinational firms?

- **Barriers in communication**

Both the survey responses collected from employees and interview feedback from leaders suggests gaps in communication in their multinational/multicultural environments. Interviewees outlined misinterpretation and misunderstanding of language, tone, and non-verbal communication, while respondents give a mixed responses on this, with a majority agreeing that their leaders communicated effectively with them.

Table 7: Effectiveness of communication – Interview insight vs Survey responses

Source	Positive responses	Negative responses
Interview (Nvivo coding)	Leader try to simplify their messages, they use interpreters, and digital translation tools	Differences in language and misinterpretation of gestures break communication
Survey (Likert)	The majority agree or strongly agree to the effectiveness of leaders communication	The majority agree or strongly agree to the effectiveness of leaders communication

Source: Author’s work, 2025

This reveals that while there is inconsistency in communication across diverse teams, most team members are satisfied with their leaders’ communication style and strategies. This is in conformance with high-and-low-context communication that highlights misinterpretation of meanings among cultures (Hayati and Sinha, 2024). Leaders need to adapt their style to retain members and improve their satisfaction.

- **Diverse work practices and cultural norms**

While the survey responses on 'respect for culture' show about two-thirds of the respondents agreeing, the others selected either neutral or disagree. This was confirmed by the Interviewees' response on differences in Cultural perspectives and expectations which led to misunderstandings.

This confirms the difficulties in leading with Hofstede's (2001) power distance and individualism-collectivism dimensions for instance. Leaders should be aware of this contrast and navigate them towards effective collaboration.

- Time zone differences and logistical constraints

Multi-national leaders revealed that time zones and infrastructure issues are a major challenge that impeded team coordination.

"You need to be very mindful of the time zone because then it will be like you are kind of invading."

"Inadequate infrastructure and poor internet connectivity have mostly made digital transformation difficult in our part of the world"

Employees confirmed this. However, the majority agree that digital tools (zoom and teams) and their managers adaptability partially resolved this issue, a minority disagreed or stayed neutral, citing challenges.

This highlights that multinational leadership becomes more complex when cultural issues are complicated with logistical hinderances, causing managers to manage both operational constraints and cultural diversity (Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000).

4.2.2RQ2. How do leadership strategies apply in managing multicultural teams?

- Inclusive and flexible Leadership approach

Leaders' response in interview highlighted the need for adjustment in their communication style and convenience to motivate employee's participation. This was confirmed in the survey in which a majority of employees agreed to the questions "My leader communicates effectively..." and "respect and inclusion".

Table 8: Comparing survey score with Interview themes on the effective leadership strategies

Employees perception of leaders adaptability - Likert		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	0	0%
Disagree (2)	1	3%
Neutral (3)	7	23%
Agree (4)	14	47%
Strongly Agree (5)	8	27%
Interview responses from cross-cultural leaders		
Themes	Nodes	Examples
Effective Leadership Strategies	Flexible communication style	"you need to be a bit more flexible in your communication." "somebody to assist with an interpretation " of different languages

Source: Author's work, 2025

This depicts an improved adaptation of openness and adaptability (inclusive leadership) in contemporary cross-cultural environments (Nishii and Mayer, 2009). However, leader have to implement strategies to ensure that employees in the minority are encouraged to participate in the team through inclusion and effective communication methodologies.

- Respect, ‘personalised attention’, empathy

Feedback from interviews with leaders suggest that while both empathic and open leaders and rigid leaders are likely to reach set organisational targets, the impact of these two approaches on employees’ psychological safety could differ and was critical. While some employee felt safe to share their opinions and make mistakes, about one third felt otherwise, with a majority showcasing their fear by selecting ‘neutral’.

This calls for a need for emotional intelligence, as mentioned by leaders as a critical competency of leadership in the global environment today (Goleman, 2016).

- Effective use of Digital tools and Artificial Intelligence

The majority of employees agreed facilitated in collaborating with other team members and leaders worldwide notwithstanding the setbacks. This was confirmed by leaders in their response on how they relied on digital tools in managing their teams. They confirmed the setbacks by highlighting data privacy issues, depression, and their need for digital literacy as a competency they need.

Table 9: Comparing survey score with Interview themes on impact of digital tools

Digital tools and culturally diverse teams		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	1	3%
Disagree (2)	2	7%
Neutral (3)	2	7%
Agree (4)	9	30%
Strongly Agree (5)	16	53%
Interview responses from cross-cultural leaders		
Themes	Nodes	Examples
Digital transformation effects	Artificial intelligence and Automation	"Because AI systems operate without emotion, they can offer neutral and consistent support in areas like performance reviews, scheduling, and resource allocation"
		"It allows for diverse global participation"
	Advantages and disadvantages of digital tools	"There is risk attached to AI; being said, data protection issues."
		"depressions and all of that as a result of people staying or working from home and not meeting their colleagues in person "

Source: Author’s work, 2025

This confirms that digital tools can improve collaboration and facilitate processes, yet, they cannot replace humans and face-to-face interaction in spite of its effectiveness (Purvanova, 2014). There are additional risks attached that need to be noted and resolved.

4.2.3 RQ3: What competences of multinational leaders impact the global team's performance?

Leaders highlighted the following as critical skills and competencies leaders need to survive in multinational cross-cultural organisations: Emotional intelligence, Cultural intelligence, multilingualism and literacy in digital tools. Employees confirmed this by agreeing in majority to survey questions whether leaders respected and valued their perspectives, and “My leader adapts their leadership style...”

These confirms the need for adaptability and cultural intelligence explored by the GLOBE study (2004) and Ang et al. (2007) respectively. Thus, to maximise productivity, future leaders of diverse environments should balance technical skills with soft skills.

4.2.4 RQ4: What acceptable leadership practices apply in influencing employee satisfaction and productivity/performance?

- Psychological safety and Inclusion.

Again, leaders highlighted in Interview responses how they implemented open communication strategies, and made employees felt free and engaged in their works. Employees confirmed this with the majority agreement to whether they felt psychologically safe in their working environments while the others agree to the contrary.

These findings support Edmondson's (1999) study which showed the relationship between performance and psychological safe and inclusion. These findings call on all leaders to evenly and consistently apply strategies that encourages inclusion and psychological safety in their organisations.

- Recognition and motivation

Interview responses highlighted that motivating the cross-cultural team can improve their satisfaction and willingness to take up additional roles:

“Motivating your team to take up certain delegated tasks and roles, and ownership of processes is a good way to make them feel valued and satisfied in the team.”

This aligns with a majority of respondents (employees) agreeing to the question “My leader's management style motivates me and makes me feel satisfied at work.”

Table 10: My leader's management style motivates me and makes me feel satisfied at work		
Scale point	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree (1)	1	3%
Disagree (2)	2	7%
Neutral (3)	4	13%
Agree (4)	13	43%
Strongly Agree (5)	10	33%

Source: Author's work, 2025

These findings confirms that recognition, motivation and respect foster satisfaction and performance as highlighted in the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2000). Notwithstanding, leaders need to improve on their style in order to accommodate the remaining few respondents who disagreed with their style.

- Triangulating findings

Comparing results from interview and responses from survey clearly paint divergence (mixed perception or disagreement) and convergence (agreement or intersection) on issues from both sources.

- Divergence – there was a disagreement on opinions from both sources on psychological safety and adaptability of leaders. Some leaders responded in interview that they were not willing to adapt to diverse employees' culture, while employees survey show mixed perceptions on both topics
- Convergence – Both employees and leaders confirmed that empathy, cultural intelligence, inclusivity and effective communication were vital leadership competencies.

Figure 8: Triangulating main themes.....

Themes	Interview evidence	Survey response	Intergrated insight
Communication	Misinterpretation of tone and non verbal communication and language barrier; Leader used digital tool	The majority agreed that leaders communicate with them, but a few disagreed	Communication among cross-cultural teams is generally effective, though inconsistent
Leadership style	Bespoke/situational leadership style; inclusive and transformative style	The majority agreed that leaders are adapting their style to suit their cultural background	The key competency is the adaptability of the leader but it varies from leader to leader
Psychological safety	Level of empathy of global leaders differ, thus breaking the uniformity in psychologically safe	Balanced/polarized responses from survey respondents	Dependent on the leader and the context
Future competencies	Emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, digital literacy, multilingualism	The majority agreed to questions on Respect, feedback, adaptability, effective communication	There is the need for leaders to upgrade themselves in more hybrid skills and an improvement in their adaptability strategies
Inclusion and respect	Leaders perceive that employees feel valued when they are involved and their feedback respected	Mixed responses with more than one-third either staying neutral or disagreeing	Cross-cultural teams are included in several context but this is not universal

Source: Author's work, 2025

In summary, the findings and analysis suggest that an effective cross-cultural leadership is needed in the increasing globalised environment. Triangulating findings from both Interviews and surveys highlighted respect, technology, trust and communication as critical to the satisfaction and performance of employees. Even though, many global leaders are motivating their culturally diverse teams' satisfaction and performance with their adaptability strategies, the practice is inconsistent across multinational organisations. There is therefore the need for contemporary and future leaders to inculcate competencies such as digital literacy, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and multilingualism.

4.3 Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the research on how global leaders' strategies impact cross-cultural teams' satisfaction and performance. With the aim of highlighting theoretical and practical implication of the study, this section relates results from previous sections 4.1 and 4.2 to prior scholarly works and theories.

This session is organised under four themes which are connected to among other base frameworks like Hall's high-and low-context communication theory (1976), Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001), the Globe study (House et al., 2004).

4.3.1 Cross-Cultural / cross-national challenges

- Barriers in communication and language

Findings from both Interviews and surveys highlighted the strength and setbacks of communication across cultural and national boundaries. Many leaders revealed how tone, language and non-verbal aspects of communication can be misinterpreted, notwithstanding, most employees agreed that their leaders communicated effectively with them.

This difference is well explained in the high-context and low-context communication theory by Hall (1976). For instance, a leader needs to be direct and explicit when managing cross-cultural teams predominantly from low-context cultures like Germany and USA; the opposite is true in high-context cultures like Arabian and Japanese culture (where non-verbal gestures and contexts carry more meanings).

Leaders, thus, have to build competencies in communication in order to effectively lead multicultural teams Thomas and Peterson (2017). Global leaders need to communicate clearly, and seek feedback to ensure understanding.

- Diverse work practices and cultural norms

The research further highlighted how contemporary leaders try to adapt to, include and value their teams' cultural background, especially in decision making, as compared to how employees perceived this leadership strategy. The majority of employees felt valued but a minority felt otherwise. Power distance and individualism-collectivism dimensions can explain this difference (Hofstede, 2001). Teams from high power-distance cultures (Indians respondents) do not expect to be a part of decision making, and vice versa. For instance, all Indians respondents agreed to the decision-making style of their leaders.

Further, leaders need to be objective in balancing differing cultural norms, as highlighted in interview responses, to manage conflicts among cross-cultural teams (Adler and Gundersen's, 2017).

- Time zone differences and logistical constraints

According to feedback from interviewees, different time zones create inconveniences for leaders in managing multinational teams. Though employees and leaders acknowledged how effective digital tools and AI has been effective in ensuring collaboration among teams, these tools come with their own challenges. Leaders thus need extra efforts to manage virtual team's trusts and cooperation, aligning with Purvanova's (2014) article on Face-to-face versus virtual teams.

4.3.2 Leadership strategies applied in managing multicultural teams

- Inclusive and flexible Leadership approach

Though the study highlighted that some leaders are not flexible with their style of leadership, effective leaders in cross-cultural environment is majorly dependent on the leader's adaptability. Openness in communication and involvement of the larger team in decision making and management, which directly impacted satisfaction and performance.

The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) and Nishii and Mayer (2009) explain the reasoning behind how inclusivity and adaptability of the global leader impacts satisfaction. Nishii and Mayer (2009) for instance suggested a positive relationship between performance and active involvement of the team in decision making and management.

Charismatic/value-based and team-oriented leadership postulated in the GLOBE theory has been universally applicable with leaders exhibiting them in varying degrees. This is however positively related to employee satisfaction and performance.

- Respect, 'personalised attention', empathy

Leaders highlighted the role of empathy in interview responses. Employees agree that they are motivated and feel satisfied to work in psychologically safe environments which is usually created by empathic leaders.

Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence theory explains self-awareness and empathy as critical competencies of leaders. Mayer et al. (2016) further identified that emotionally intelligent leaders motivate collaboration, trust and cooperation among diverse teams.

- Effective use of Digital tools and Artificial Intelligence

Technology/digital tools and Artificial intelligence, though (according to a majority of survey respondents) facilitated cross-boundary collaboration, can negatively affected interpersonal relationships and data confidentiality, as leaders/interviewees identified.

The global leaders' intervention is critical in maintaining relational glue between distanced teams who are bonded by these digital platforms. This is because diversity can have both positive and negative impact on teams' performance, and thus need effective management towards a common goal (Stahl et. Al., 2010)

4.3.3 Competences of multinational leaders impact the global team's performance

Both Interview and survey responses highlighted the need for Emotional intelligence in building trust among diverse teams as identified by Mayer et al. (2016); Cultural Intelligence as critical requirement for global leaders highlighted by Ang et al. (2007); digital literacy which has become a necessity in the technology driven cultural environment as noted by Abada (2024).

Contemporary global leaders should adopt a hybrid skillset which blends technical expertise and human-centred skills.

4.3.4 Leadership practices apply in influencing employee satisfaction and productivity/performance

- Psychological safety and Inclusion

Even though, a few agreed that they felt less involvement in their cross-cultural teams, others felt involved and free to share ideas and make mistakes towards reaching organisations' goals. Edmondson (1999) suggested that the team should not be afraid of negative consequences in sharing their diverse opinions (psychological safety).

Satisfaction and organisational performance are high when leaders involved members, reinforcing the self-determination theory which links motivation to autonomy and competence Deci and Ryan (2000).

- Recognition and motivation

The survey results indicated that the morale of the team goes up when they feel that their cultural values are noticed in cross-cultural teams. The transformational leadership theory by Bass (1990) explains this, emphasising that employee recognition, inspiration and share vision are motivation factors for employees.

- Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to cross-cultural team management and leadership theories with the following

- i. Triangulate evidences of data collected from diverse sources in a broad pattern from employees quantitatively, and qualitative data from global leaders
- ii. Highlight the intercession of the need for digital intelligence and cultural intelligence
- iii. Emphasising the diverse perspectives of employees on leadership effectiveness and the need for bespoke approach in leading

In addition, the study shows a relationship between culture, technology and emotions which expands on universal leadership theories and practices. The findings that the effectiveness of leadership is situational, and not biased with national values further expands Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. The findings of how digital collaboration has reshaped cross-cultural team management adds to the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2004). Participants confirmation that self-awareness and empathy impact team performance complements the Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1998). The need for inspirational visionary culturally sensitive leadership, as noted in the study is extends the Transformational leadership theory (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

- Practical implications

Not only does this study contribute scholarly, multinational firms and leaders of cross-cultural teams can deduce meanings and apply the findings to impact satisfaction and performance. This includes the following

- i. The need to regularly measure psychological safety of staff through surveys and observations
- ii. Institutionalising inclusivity, ensuring feedback and avoiding discrimination
- iii. Organising systematic training on Cultural Intelligence, emotional intelligence and digital literacy
- iv. Ensuring a good balance between technology and relational practices

- Limitation and Future Research

Aside the time constraint, limitation in using qualitative analysis, and the researcher's cultural bias as discussed in the methodology, the study has other limitations. There is also a constraint in the generalisability of the study due to the limited total sample size. Another limitation is self-reporting bias where leaders are likely to be biased especially because they will be self-reporting the effectiveness of the effectiveness of their own leadership style and strategy.

With reference to the above limitations, future research can increase sample size to cover more participants from other backgrounds, organisations, nations. This will make the study applicable in specific cultures and contexts. In addition, future research can use observation data or performance indicators in their analysis to reduce self-reporting bias by global leaders reporting on their own strategies.

In summary, the discussion reveals that the satisfaction and performance of cross-cultural teams in multinational firms depend on the leaders' empathy, flexibility, inclusivity, digital competence. In addition, effective global leadership balances the need for soft skills, cultural intelligence, and emotional intelligence with technical skills. Having noted some limitations in the study, the findings relate to established frameworks and contemporary theories in leading multinational firms and cross-cultural teams.

Concluding Remarks

This study discussed on various strategies that global leaders of cross-cultural teams implemented in managing teams, the effectiveness of these strategies, and their effects on the performance and satisfaction of cross-cultural teams in multinational organisations. Data collected from employees and global leaders through survey and interviews respectively were qualitatively analysed. Interviews with leaders were transcribed, reviewed and coded into themes, while survey data was analysed using Microsoft Excel. The findings presented a representation of diverse challenges the cross-cultural leader face in multinational firms, with attention on the strategies these leaders implemented towards improving employee satisfaction, and performance outcomes from implemented strategies.

The findings and analysis suggested that an effective cross-cultural leadership is needed in the increasing globalised environment. Triangulating findings from both Interviews and surveys highlighted that respect, technology, trust and communication were critical to the satisfaction and performance of employees. Even though, many global leaders were motivating their culturally diverse teams' satisfaction and performance with their adaptability strategies, the practice is inconsistent across multinational organisations. There is therefore the need for contemporary and future leaders to inculcate competencies such as digital literacy, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and multilingualism.

There exist both opportunities and threats in working cross-cultural teams. Employees agreed that their cultural background are generally respected by leaders and members in the culturally diverse teams, they further agreed that they were majorly included in decisions, and that they felt safe in sharing opposing ideas and communication with their leaders. Further, a majority selected that Digital tools facilitated cross-cultural communication. Notwithstanding, a number chose contrary opinions, signifying the need for global managers and leaders to sacrifice part of technical and managerial skills for more effective human-centred strategies that will totally accommodate employees from diverse backgrounds towards higher satisfaction and performance results.

This study as well affirms Cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2007), Emotional Intelligence, (Goleman 2016), Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) as critical theories which when applied maintains a safe environment, and cohesion among team members, motivating them towards reaching shared goals. In addition, the finding revealed the direct relationship between inclusivity and employee satisfaction, confirming Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory which highlights recognition and autonomy are motivating factors for performance.

The study on the contrary noted some findings that contradicted previous theories and frameworks. For instance, the research noted that digitalisation and digital tools for communication transcends traditional cultural barriers; this contradicts the high-and-low context communication theory by Halls (1976) which identifies culture as the main cause of misinterpretation in cross-cultural communication. Notwithstanding, digital tools can improve collaboration and facilitate processes, yet, they cannot replace humans and face-to-face interaction in spite of its effectiveness (Purvanova, 2014).

Some limitations that were noted in this study including data collection bias which majorly favoured accessible participants via purposive and snowball sampling method. The use of qualitative analysis was a limitation that was subject to the cultural bias analysis of the researcher. However, triangulation of findings, and the oversight of a research supervisor and peer review mitigated this risk to a high degree. The limited total sample size constraints the generalisability of the study. Another limitation was the likelihood that leaders

reported positively about their own strategies in the interview (self-reporting bias). Future research can work on these limitations for better research findings.

To conclude, satisfaction and performance of cross-cultural teams demand the leaders' flexibility, their balance of soft skills and technical skills, empathy and competence in the use of digital tools. They also need to be open in their communication, while they foster inclusivity and trust among the culturally diverse team. Organisations should as well endeavour to maintain a psychologically safe business environment, serve as models for cultural diversity, and organise training programs on cultural diversity, cultural intelligence and Emotional intelligence to improve the cultural awareness and maintain cohesion among the culturally diverse teams.

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